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(54) **SIGNAL AMPLIFIERS THAT SWITCH TO AN ATTENUATED OR ALTERNATE COMMUNICATIONS PATH IN RESPONSE TO A POWER INTERRUPTION**

(58) **Field of Classification Search**
USPC 455/3.05, 15, 103, 127.1, 132, 133, 455/343.1; 725/64, 127, 149
See application file for complete search history.

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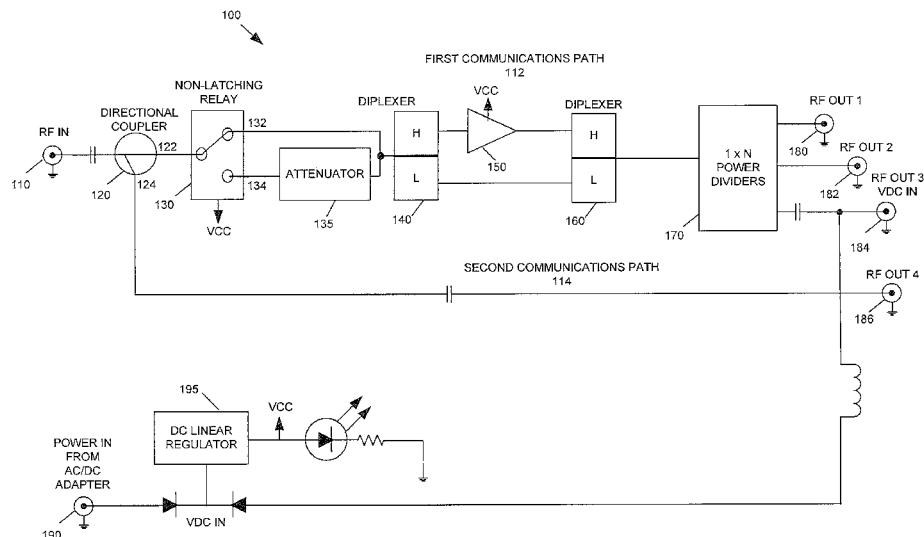
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ABSTRACT

RF signal amplifiers are provided that include an RF input port, a switching device having an input that is coupled to the RF input port, a first output and a second output, a first diplexer having an input that is coupled to both the first output of the switching device and the second output of the switching device, and a first RF output port that is coupled to an output of the first diplexer. These amplifiers further include an attenuator that is coupled between the second output of the switching device and the input of the first diplexer.

15 Claims, 7 Drawing Sheets



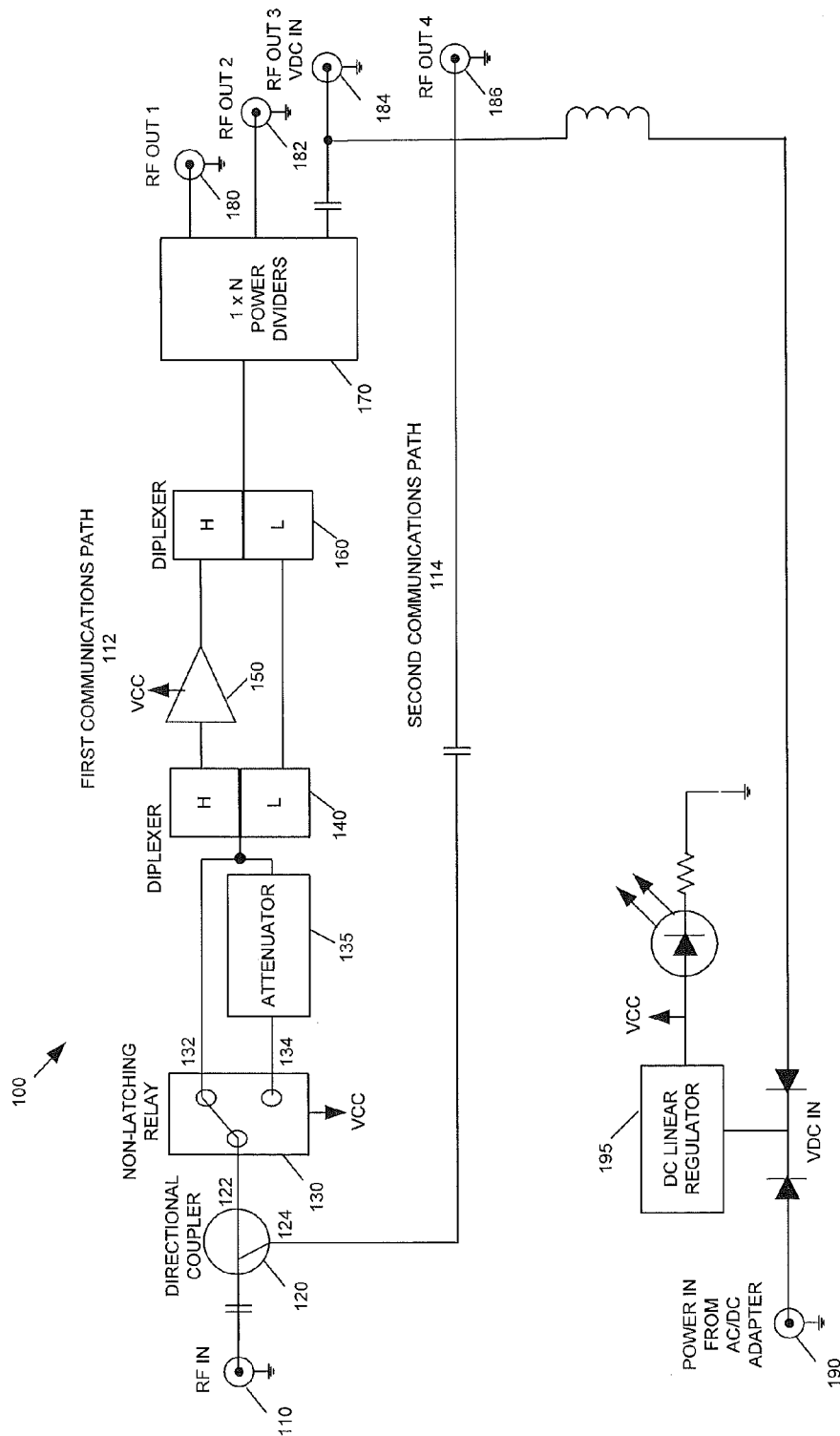


FIG. 1

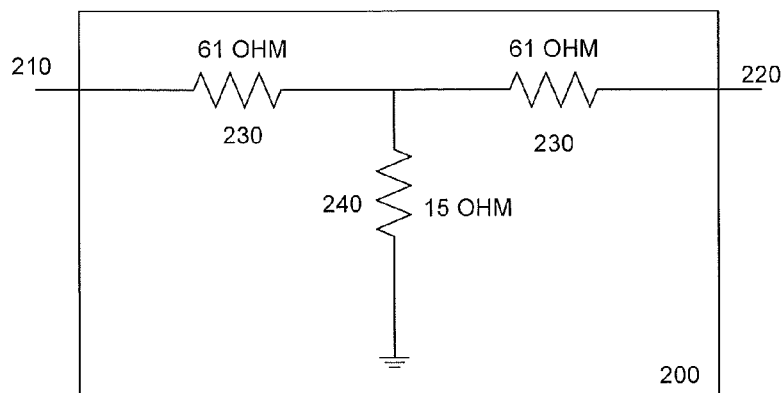


FIG. 2

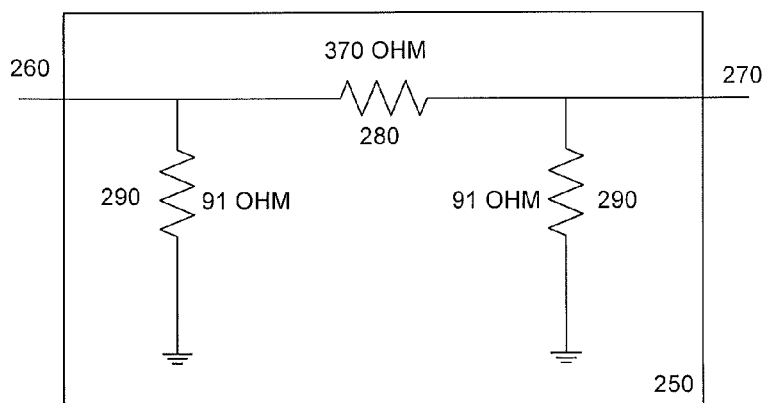
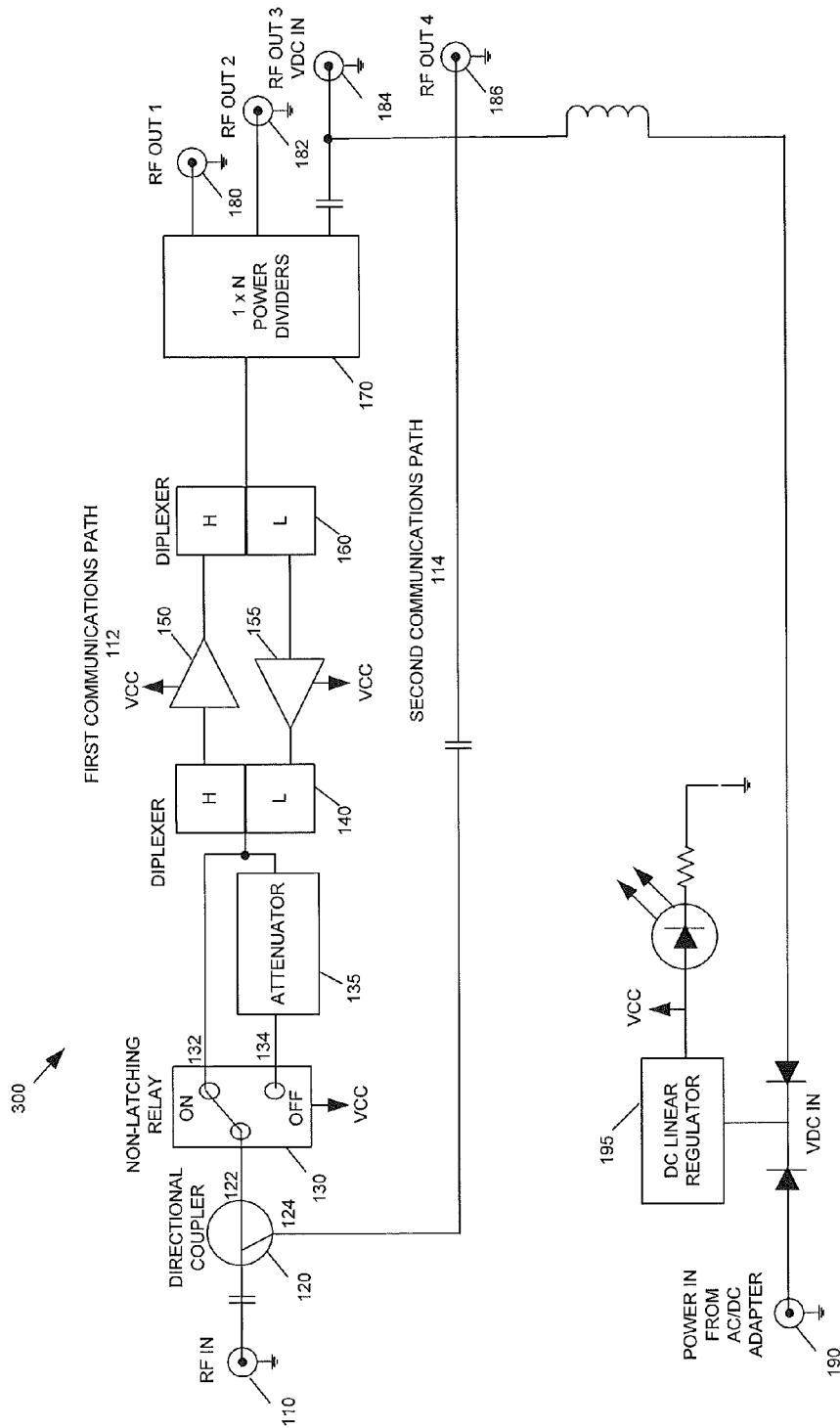


FIG. 3



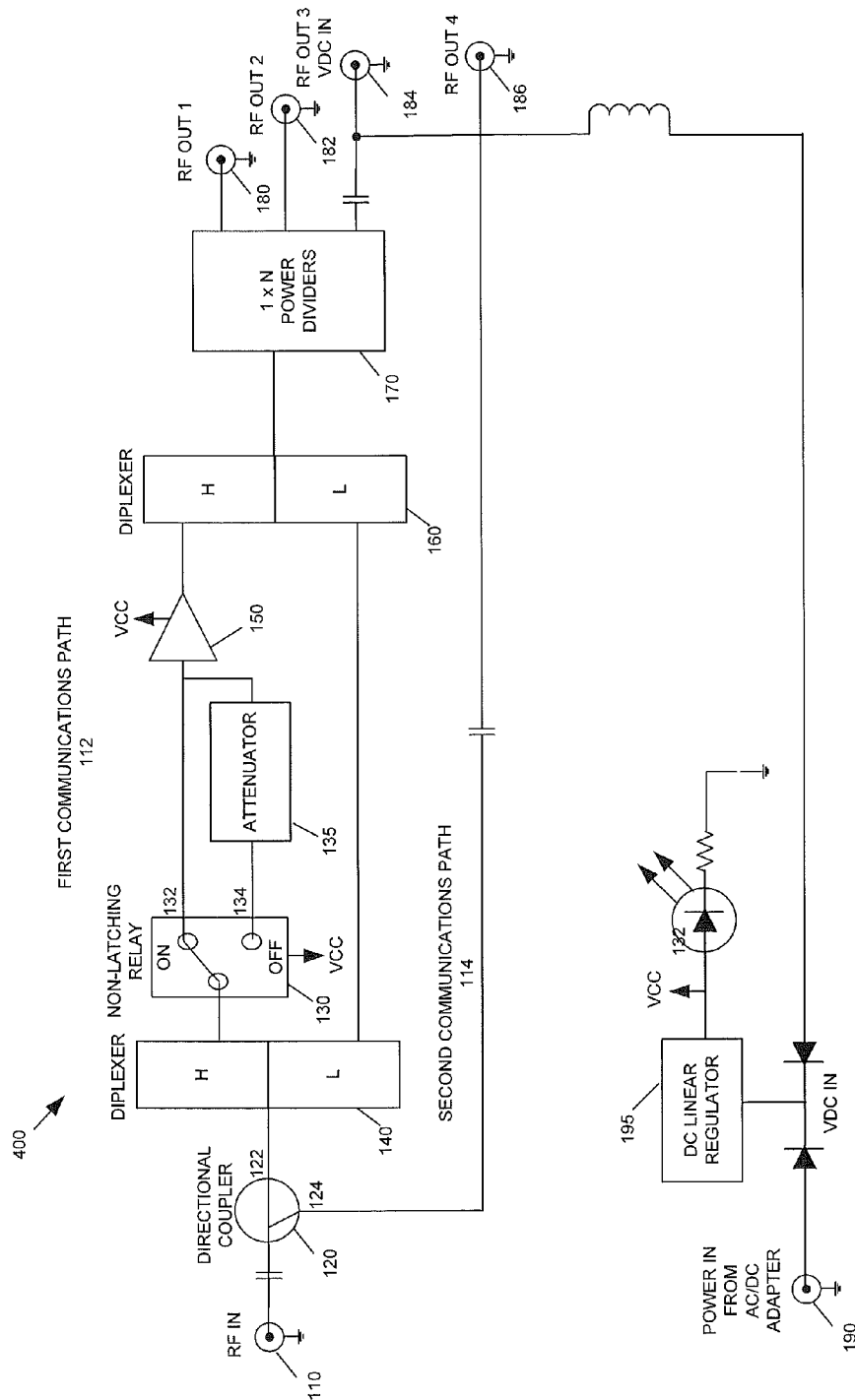


FIG. 5

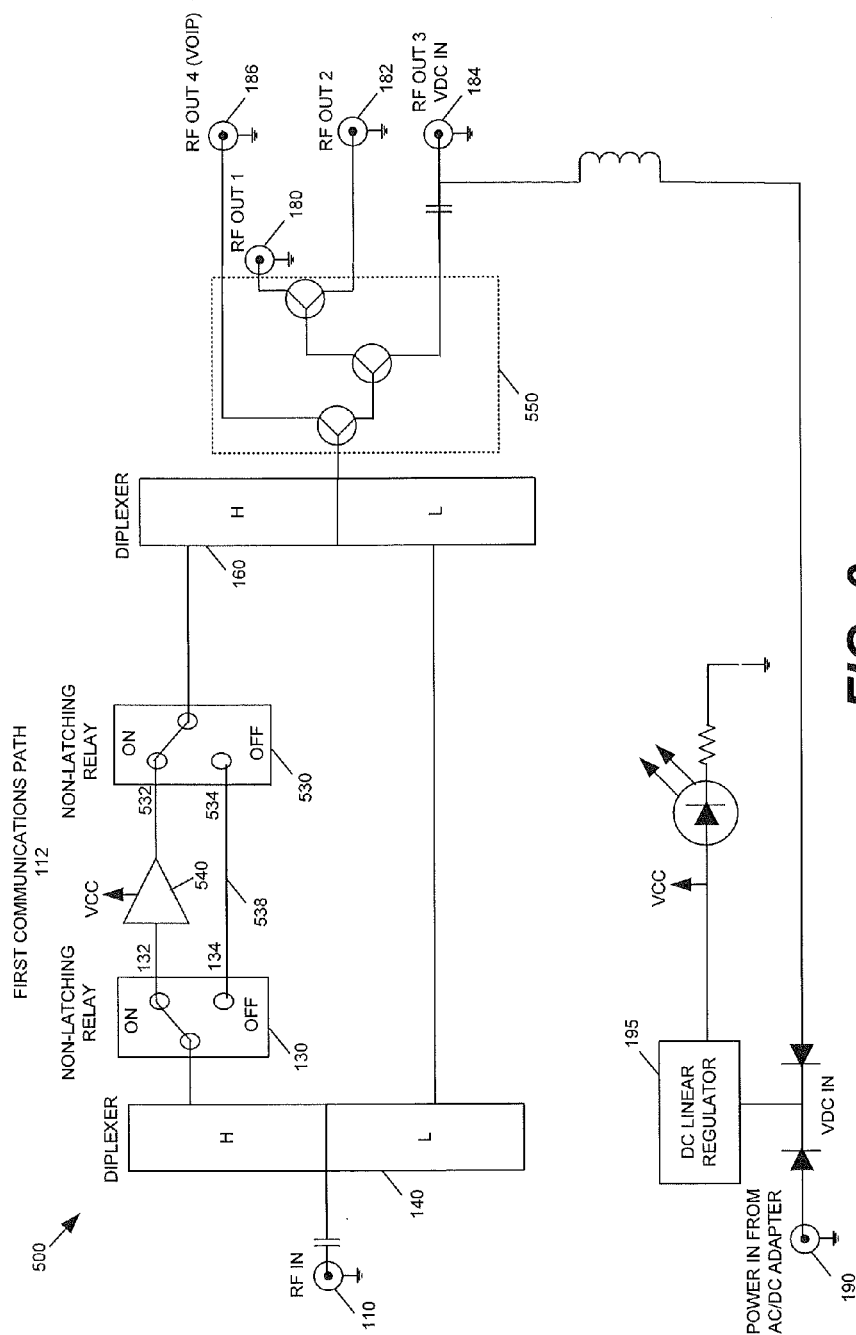


FIG. 6

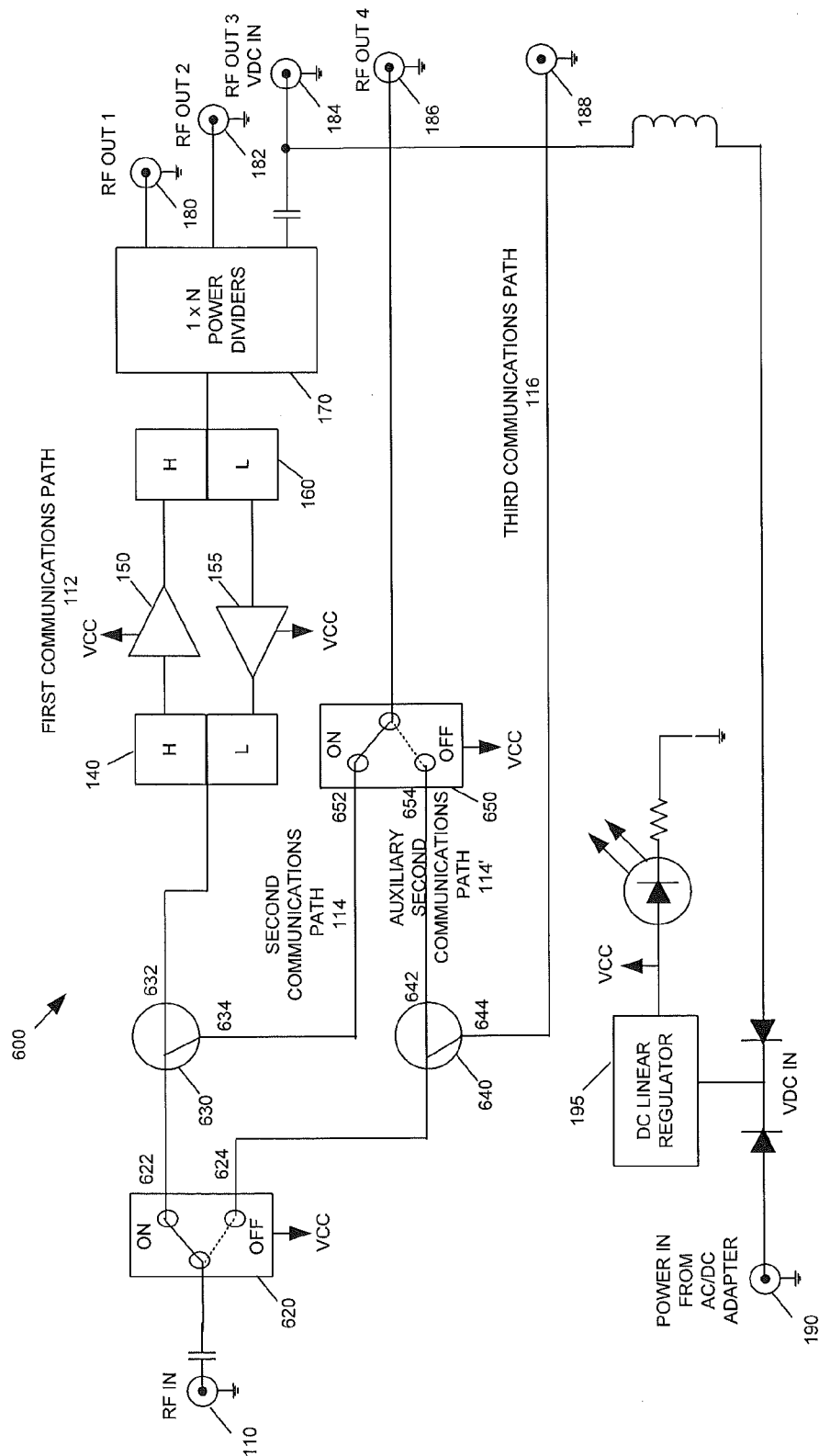


FIG. 7

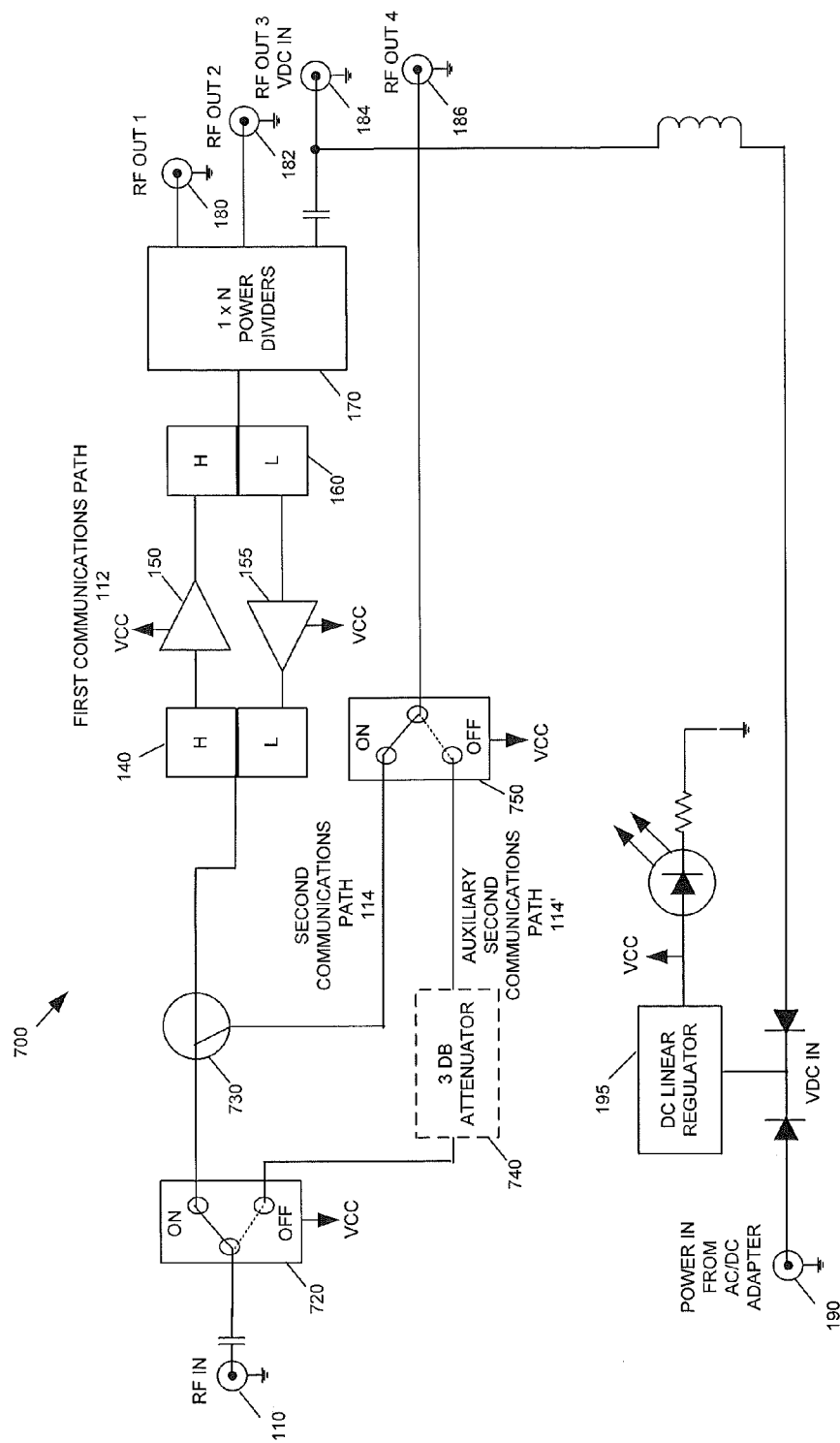


FIG. 8

1

SIGNAL AMPLIFIERS THAT SWITCH TO AN ATTENUATED OR ALTERNATE COMMUNICATIONS PATH IN RESPONSE TO A POWER INTERRUPTION

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention is directed to technology for providing non-interruptible communications.

BACKGROUND

In recent years, the rise of the Internet and other online communications methods have rapidly transformed the manner in which electronic communications take place. Today, rather than relying on prior-generation switched telephone communications arrangements, many service providers are turning to Internet Protocol (IP) based communications networks. Such networks can provide flexibility in facilitating the transmission of voice, data, video, and other information at great speeds.

In many cases, the above-referenced IP communications networks may comprise cable television networks that are used to transmit cable television signals and other information between a service provider and a plurality of subscribers, typically over coaxial and/or fiber optic cables. Typically, the service provider is a cable television company that may offer, among other things, cable television, broadband Internet and Voice-over-Internet Protocol ("VoIP") digital telephone service to subscribers within a particular geographic area. A subscriber may receive all of these services through a single radio frequency ("RF") connection between the service provider and the subscriber premise. The service provider may transmit both "downstream" signals (which are also sometimes referred to as "forward path" signals) from the headend facilities of the cable television network to the subscriber premises and "upstream" signals (which are also sometimes referred to as "reverse path" signals) from the individual subscriber premises back to the headend facilities. The downstream signals are currently transmitted in the 54-1002 MHz frequency band, and may include, for example, different tiers of cable television channels, movies on demand, digital telephone and/or Internet service (the signals received by the subscriber), and other broadcast or point-to-point offerings. The upstream signals are currently transmitted in the 5-42 MHz frequency band and may include, for example, signals associated with digital telephone and/or Internet service (the signals transmitted by the subscriber) and ordering commands (i.e., for movies-on-demand and other services).

In many cases, significant attenuation may occur as signals are passed through the cable television network, and hence the power level of the RF signal that is received at subscriber premises may be on the order of 0-5 dBmV/channel. Such received signal levels may be insufficient to support the various services at an acceptable quality of service level. Accordingly, RF signal amplifiers may be provided at or near individual subscriber premises that are used to amplify the downstream RF signals to a more useful level. These RF signals amplifier may also be configured to amplify the upstream RF signals that are transmitted from the subscriber premise to the headend facilities of the cable television network.

Unfortunately, RF signal amplifiers comprise active devices that require a power feed for proper operation. Accordingly, if power to an RF signal amplifier is interrupted, some or all of the communications between the service provider and the subscriber premise may be lost. Although such

2

interruptions may be tolerated in relation to certain non-essential services, interruptions to other services may be unacceptable. For example, subscribers relying on IP-based emergency communications (i.e., 911 service) can be left without such services during power interruptions.

In order to remedy this problem, some subscribers may be inclined to acquire a dedicated switched telephone line to provide emergency services during power interruptions. Nevertheless, such an option can require the subscriber to incur additional costs, and fails to capitalize on the advantages offered by IP-based communication.

SUMMARY

Pursuant to embodiments of the present invention, bi-directional RF signal amplifiers are provided that include an RF input port, a switching device having an input that is coupled to the RF input port, a first output and a second output, a first diplexer having an input that is coupled to both the first output of the switching device and the second output of the switching device, and a first RF output port that is coupled to an output of the first diplexer. These amplifiers further include an attenuator that is coupled between the second output of the switching device and the input of the first diplexer.

In some embodiments, these amplifiers may further include a power input for receiving electrical power. In such embodiments, the switching device may be configured to pass signals between the input of the switching device and the first output of the switching device when electrical power is received at the power input and may be further configured to pass signals between the input of the switching device and the second output of the switching device when an electrical power feed to the power input is interrupted. The attenuator may, for example, include an attenuator input port, an attenuator output port, at least one resistor coupled in series on a signal path extending between the attenuator input port and the attenuator output port and at least one resistor shunted between the signal path and a reference voltage.

In some embodiments, the amplifier may also include a second RF output port and a directional coupler having an input that is coupled to the RF input port, a first output that is coupled to the input of the switching device and a second output that is coupled to the second RF output port via a non-interruptible communications path. The amplifier may also include a power amplifier having an input that is coupled to an output of the first diplexer and a second diplexer that is coupled between an output of the power amplifier and the first RF output port. In some embodiments, the amplifier may further include a second non-interruptible communications path that is configured to pass upstream signals from the first RF output port to the RF input port via the attenuator when the electrical power feed to the power input is interrupted.

Pursuant to further embodiments of the present invention, RF signal amplifiers are provided that include a power regulation circuit that is configured to generate a power supply voltage in response to power received from an external source, an RF input port, and first and second RF output ports. These amplifiers further include a first communications path that extends between the RF input port and the first RF output port. This first communications path may include a power amplifier that is configured to amplify downstream signals passing from the RF input port to the first RF output port. The amplifiers may also include a second, non-interruptible communications path that extends between the RF input port and the second RF output port. The second, non-interruptible communications path may be configured to support both downstream and upstream RF communications even in the

3

absence of power from the external source. Finally, the amplifiers may include a switching device that is configured to selectively switch a circuit element in series onto the first communications path in response to a loss of power from the external source.

In some embodiments, the circuit element may be an attenuator, and the switching device may be a non-latching relay. Moreover, the RF signal amplifier may further include a first diplexer that is coupled between a first output of the switching device and the first RF output port, a second diplexer that is coupled between the first diplexer and the first RF output port, and a power amplifier that is coupled between the first and second diplexers. In some embodiments, a directional coupler may also be included in the amplifier that has an input that is coupled to the RF input port, a first output that is coupled to the first communications path and a second output that is coupled to the second, non-interruptible communications path.

Pursuant to still further embodiments of the present invention, bi-directional RF signal amplifiers are provided that include an RF input port, a first switching device having an input that is coupled to the RF input port, a second switching device having an input that is coupled to a non-interruptible RF output port, and a directional coupler having an input that is coupled to a first output of the first switching device, a first output that is coupled to an amplified communications path and a second output that is coupled to a first output of the second switching device.

In some embodiments, the second output of the first switching device may be coupled to a second output of the second switching device. In such embodiments, the RF signal amplifier may further include a second directional coupler having an input that is coupled to the second output of the first switching device, a first output that is coupled to the second output of the second switching device and a second output that is coupled to a second non-interruptible RF output port or an attenuator that is coupled between the second output of the first switching device and the second output of the second switching device. In some embodiments, an insertion loss on a communications path between the RF input port and the non-interruptible RF output port is less than 1.5 dB.

Pursuant to still further embodiments of the present invention, bi-directional RF signal amplifiers are provided that include an RF input port and first and second RF output ports. These amplifiers further include an amplified communications path that connects the RF input port to the first RF output port and a non-amplified communications path that connects the RF input port to the second RF output port. The amplifiers also include a first switching device that is part of both the amplified communications path and the non-amplified communication path and a second switching device that is part of the non-amplified communications path. The bi-directional RF signal amplifier is configured to simultaneously carry signals on both the amplified communications path and the non-amplified communications path when power is supplied to the RF signal amplifier.

In some embodiments, the second switching device is not part of the amplified communications path. In some embodiments, the amplifier may further include a directional coupler that is part of both the amplified and the non-amplified communications paths when power is supplied to the RF signal amplifier, but which is not part of the non-amplified communications path when power is not supplied to the RF amplifier.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a block diagram of a bi-directional RF signal amplifier according to embodiments of the present invention.

4

FIG. 2 is a circuit diagram of an attenuator according to certain embodiments of the present invention that may be used to implement the attenuator of FIG. 1.

FIG. 3 is a circuit diagram of an attenuator according to further embodiments of the present invention that may be used to implement the attenuator of FIG. 1.

FIG. 4 is a block diagram of a bi-directional RF signal amplifier according to further embodiments of the present invention.

FIG. 5 is a block diagram of a bi-directional RF signal amplifier according to still further embodiments of the present invention.

FIG. 6 is a block diagram of a bi-directional RF signal amplifier according to yet additional embodiments of the present invention.

FIG. 7 is a block diagram of a bi-directional RF signal amplifier according to even further embodiments of the present invention.

FIG. 8 is a block diagram of a bi-directional RF signal amplifier according to still further embodiments of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Embodiments of the present invention now will be described more fully hereinafter with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which embodiments of the invention are shown. This invention may, however, be embodied in many different forms and should not be construed as limited to the embodiments set forth herein. Rather, these embodiments are provided so that this disclosure will be thorough and complete, and will fully convey the scope of the invention to those skilled in the art. Like numbers refer to like elements throughout.

It will be understood that, although the terms first, second, etc. may be used herein to describe various elements, these elements should not be limited by these terms. These terms are only used to distinguish one element from another. For example, a first element could be termed a second element, and, similarly, a second element could be termed a first element, without departing from the scope of the present invention. As used herein, the term “and/or” includes any and all combinations of one or more of the associated listed items.

It will be understood that when an element is referred to as being “connected” or “coupled” to another element, it can be directly connected or coupled to the other element or intervening elements may be present. In contrast, when an element is referred to as being “directly connected” or “directly coupled” to another element, there are no intervening elements present. Other words used to describe the relationship between elements should be interpreted in a like fashion (i.e., “between” versus “directly between”, etc.).

In accordance with various embodiments set forth in the present disclosure, bi-directional RF signal amplifiers are provided that each have at least one non-interruptible communications port for maintaining communications in the event of a power failure. In various embodiments, the RF signal amplifier may receive RF signals from a service provider or any other appropriate signal source through an RF input port.

For example, in residential applications, an RF signal amplifier in accordance with various embodiments of the present disclosure may receive a composite downstream RF signal of approximately 5 dBmV/channel in the range of approximately 54-1002 MHz comprising information for telephone, cable television (CATV), Internet, VoIP, and/or data communications from a service provider. The RF signal amplifier may increase this downstream signal to a more

5

useful level of approximately 20 dBmV/channel and pass the amplified downstream signal to one or more devices in communication with the RF signal amplifier through various RF output ports. Such devices may include, but need not be limited to: televisions, modems, telephones, computers, and/or other communications devices known in the art. In the event of power failure, an unamplified signals may still be passed (in both directions) through a communications path between the service provider and at least one communications device.

FIG. 1 illustrates a block diagram of a bi-directional RF signal amplifier 100 according to certain embodiments of the present invention. RF signal amplifier 100 includes three RF output ports 180, 182, 184 that may be used to pass downstream and upstream signals between a service provider and multiple communications devices located in the subscriber premise when the RF signal amplifier is powered and operating normally. Moreover, RF signal amplifier 100 further includes a fourth non-interruptible RF output port 186 that may be used to maintain bi-directional RF communications even during power outages. Additionally, RF signal amplifier 100 may also maintain upstream (but not downstream) communications through RF output ports 180, 182, 184 during such power outages, which may be advantageous in some circumstances.

As shown in FIG. 1, RF signal amplifier 100 includes a bi-directional RF input port 110 for receiving downstream RF signals from a service provider, or any other appropriate signal source. RF input port 110 can also pass upstream signals in the reverse direction from the RF signal amplifier 100 to the service provider. Due to the bi-directional nature of communications through RF signal amplifiers according to embodiments of the present invention, it will be appreciated that an “input” port will act as an “output” port and an “output” port will act as an “input” port if the direction of signal flow is reversed. Consequently, it will be appreciated that the terms “input” and “output” are used herein solely for purposes of distinguishing various ports from one another, and are not used to require a direction of signal flow.

As noted above, RF signal amplifier 100 further includes a plurality of bi-directional output ports 180, 182, 184, 186 that may be used to pass downstream RF signals from the RF signal amplifier 100 to one or more devices in communication with the output ports 180, 182, 184, 186, and to receive upstream RF signals from those devices so that they may be passed through the RF signal amplifier 100 to the service provider. It will be appreciated that any appropriate device that may advantageously send and/or receive an RF signal may be placed in communication with one or more of the various output ports 180, 182, 184, 186. For example, it is contemplated that telephone, CATV, Internet, VoIP, and/or data communication devices may be placed in such communication with a service provider where the RF signal amplifier 100 is installed in the residence of a subscriber. However, it will further be appreciated that any desired combination of these and/or other devices may be used where appropriate.

Signals received through RF input port 110 can be passed through RF signal amplifier 100 via a first communications path 112 that extends between RF input port 110 and RF output ports 180, 182, and/or 184. Specifically, the downstream signals that are received at RF input port 110 from the service provider are passed to a passive directional coupler 120 that has a first output port 122 that connects to the first communications path 112 and a second output port 124 that connects to the second communications path 114. The directional coupler 120 splits downstream RF signals onto the first communications path 112 and the second communications

6

path 114. It will be appreciated that the directional coupler 120 may either evenly or unevenly split the power of the downstream signals between the first and second communications paths 112, 114, depending on the design of the overall circuit. The first communications path 112 may comprise an “active” communications path that amplifies at least one of downstream signals from the service provider to the subscriber premise or upstream signals from the subscriber premise to the service provider. The second communications path 114 may comprise a passive “non-interruptible” communications path that has no active components thereon, which allows downstream and/or upstream signals to traverse the second communications path 114 even if a power supply to the RF signal amplifier 100 is interrupted. In some embodiments, the second communications path 114 may provide a communications path for VoIP telephone service that will operate even during power outages at the subscriber premise (assuming that the modem and/or telephone, as necessary, are powered by a battery backup unit).

As is further shown in FIG. 1, downstream signals traversing the first communications path 112 pass from the first output 122 of directional coupler 120 to an input port of a switching device such as, for example, an SPDT non-latching relay 130. A first output 132 of the relay 130 is connected to an input of a high/low diplexer 140. A second output 134 of the relay 130 is connected to an attenuator 135. The design and operation of the attenuator 135 will be discussed in further detail herein.

The diplexer 140 separates the high frequency downstream signal from any low frequency upstream signals incident in the reverse direction. In various embodiments, diplexer 140 can filter the signals in a manner such that signals with frequencies greater than approximately 45-50 MHz are passed as high frequency downstream signals, while signals with frequencies lower than such range are passed in the reverse direction as low frequency upstream signals received from ports 180, 182, or 184. It will be appreciated, however, that other diplexer designs may be utilized.

The high frequency downstream signals filtered by diplexer 140 can be amplified by individual power amplifier 150, and passed through a second high/low diplexer 160 to a network of power dividers 170. The power dividers 170 may further split the downstream signal so that it may be distributed to each of RF output ports 180, 182, 184. While the power divider network 170 illustrated in FIG. 1 splits the downstream signals for distribution to three different RF output ports, it will be appreciated that the power divider network may split the downstream signals for distribution to different numbers of RF output ports (e.g., 4, 8, etc.), or may alternatively be omitted in situations where only a single RF output port is needed.

Turning now to the reverse (upstream) signal flow through the first communications path 112 of RF signal amplifier 100, upstream signals received by the RF signal amplifier 100 from devices in communication with ports 180, 182, and/or 184 are passed to power dividers 170 where they are combined into a composite upstream signal. This composite upstream signal is fed through high/low diplexer 160 for separating the low frequency composite upstream signal from any high frequency downstream signals incident in the forward direction. As previously discussed in relation to diplexer 140, the diplexer 160 can filter the signals such that signals with frequencies greater than approximately 45-50 MHz are passed in the forward direction as high frequency downstream signals, while signals with frequencies lower than

such range are passed in the reverse direction as low frequency upstream signals received from ports **180**, **182**, and/or **184**.

The composite low frequency upstream signal filtered by diplexer **160** can be passed directly to high/low diplexer **140**, where it is then passed through the first output port **132** of the non-latching SPDT relay **130** to the first output port **122** of the directional coupler **120**. The directional coupler **120** combines the upstream signal received at output port **122** with any upstream signal received at output port **124** and passes this combined signal to the RF input port **110** for output to a service provider or other entity in communication with RF input port **110**.

The power amplifier **150** that is included on the first communications path **112** is an active device that must be powered via a power source such as a DC linear regulator that output a power supply voltage VCC. During normal operation, the RF signal amplifier **100** can be powered from a power input port **190** and/or power that is reverse fed through one of the RF output ports (e.g., output port **184**, which is labeled RF OUT 3/VDC IN). In a typical installation at a subscriber premise, it is contemplated that RF signal amplifier **100** may be powered by an AC/DC adapter receiving power provided by the residence (for example, 100-230 VAC, 50/60 Hz). As illustrated in FIG. 1, the power received from either power input **190** or power input **184** may be provided to a voltage regulator **195** which supplies an operating voltage VCC to the power amplifier **150**.

In the event that power to voltage regulator **195** is interrupted, voltage regulator **195** will be unable to provide operating voltage VCC to power amplifier **150**. As a result, power amplifier **150** will not function to amplify the downstream signals received through RF input port **110** for distribution to the various output ports **180**, **182**, **184**, and will typically appear as an undefined impedance circuit. Consequently, during power outages, the downstream portion of the first communications path **112** will be lost.

As noted above, RF signal amplifier **100** also has a second communications path **114** that extends from the second output **124** of the directional coupler **120** to the RF output port **186**. This second communication path **114** bypasses the power amplifier **150** and does not include any active components; consequently, the second communications path **114** will remain available to pass communications between RF input port **110** and RF output port **186** even when the power supply to RF signal amplifier **100** is interrupted. Accordingly, the second communications path **114** is also referred to herein as a “non-interruptible” communications path. The second communications path **114** may be used to maintain essential services to the subscriber premises such as, for example, 911 emergency lifeline services, even during power outages, so long as the subscriber has a battery backup for the necessary devices connected to RF output port **186**.

As is apparent from the above discussion, the directional coupler **120** is used to split a downstream signal received through RF input port **110** into two separate components, and delivers the first component of the split signal to RF output ports **180**, **182** and **184** via the first communications path **112** and delivers the second component of the split signal to VOIP port **186** via the second communications path **114**. The directional coupler **120** likewise combines any upstream signals that are received over the first and second communications paths **112**, **114** and provides this combined upstream signal to the RF input port **110**. Consequently, even if power is interrupted such that the power amplifier **150** is rendered inoperable, a second, bi-directional, non-interruptible communications path still exists between RF input port **110** and RF

output port **186** which can be used to support at least one or more services, such as emergency **911** telephone service.

Unfortunately, when the power supply to RF signal amplifier **100** is interrupted, the power amplifier **150** may appear as an undefined impedance circuit along the first communications path **112**. When this occurs, the functional impedance at the first output **122** of the directional coupler **120** may be difficult to predict, and will likely differ greatly from 75 ohms, which is the line impedance that coaxial cable networks are typically designed to exhibit. As a result, if the non-latching relay **130** remains set in its “through” position that is shown in FIG. 1 (which connects the input of relay **130** to output **132**), the impedances of the two outputs **122**, **124** of the directional coupler **120** will typically not be matched during power interruptions (since output **124** may have an impedance of approximately 75 ohms, whereas output **122** will typically have an impedance that differs significantly from 75 ohms due to the unknown impedance exhibited by the non-powered power amplifier **150**). Such an impedance mismatch may give rise to signal reflections and other distortions that may significantly degrade any RF signals traversing the second communications path **114**. These signal degradations may result in poor or even lost service on the second communications path **114**.

The relay **130** is included in RF signal amplifier **100** to improve the impedance match between the outputs **122**, **124** of the directional coupler **120** during power outages. In particular, as is shown in FIG. 1, the power supply voltage VCC is supplied to the relay **130**. So long as the power supply voltage VCC is received at the relay **130**, the relay **130** is maintained in its “through” position (i.e., the position illustrated in FIG. 1). In this position, downstream RF signals are passed from the input of the relay **130** to the first output **132** where they are fed directly to the first diplexer **140**. However, when power (i.e., VCC) is interrupted, the relay **130** switches from the normal signal path in the “through” position, to the “attenuated” position such that the input to the relay **130** is connected to the second output **134**. As noted above, the second output **134** of relay **130** (the “attenuated” port) is connected to an input to an attenuator **135**. The output of the attenuator **135** is connected to the input of the first diplexer **140**. When the power supply to RF signal amplifier **100** is interrupted, the relay **130** senses the interruption and automatically switches from the “through” position to the “attenuated” position, thereby placing the attenuator **135** in series between the relay **130** and the diplexer **140**. The attenuator **135** may exhibit an impedance that is relatively close to 75 ohms, and hence the first output **122** of the directional coupler **120** will see an impedance of approximately 75 ohms. As such, signal degradation due to reflections and the like can be reduced or minimized in order to provide acceptable signal quality on the second, non-interruptible communications path **114** during power outages. Thus, it will be understood that the relay **130** may be used to route signals that are carried on the first communications path **112** over either a “through” branch of the first communications path that passes directly from the relay **130** to the diplexer **140**, or instead may route the signals over an attenuated branch that passes from the relay **130**, to the attenuator **135**, and then to the diplexer **140**. The relay **130** in the disclosed embodiment may automatically route the signals to the appropriate branch of the first communications path **112** based on whether or not a power supply signal VCC is received at the relay **130**. It will also be appreciated that in other embodiments the relay **130** could be controlled manually and/or could be controlled based on other parameters (e.g., the relay could switch to the attenuated branch if a received power level is too high).

As should be clear from the above description, the RF signal amplifier **100** of FIG. **1** senses power interruptions and in response thereto automatically switches an attenuator **135** in series into the first communications path **112**. This attenuator **135** may improve the impedance match at the directional coupler **120**, and hence may improve the signal quality of signals carried over the second communications path **114** during such power interruptions.

Notably, when the attenuator **135** is switched into the first communications path **112** during power outages, a reverse upstream communications path is left in place between the RF output ports **180**, **182**, **184** and the RF input port that passes through the attenuator **135**. In some embodiments, a relatively low value attenuator such as, for example, a 6 dB attenuator or an 8 dB attenuator may be used to implement the attenuator **135**. Consequently, lower data rate upstream communications may be maintained between devices connected to RF output ports **180**, **182**, and/or **184** and the service provider, even during power outages.

For example, in some embodiments, downstream communications for certain services may be provided to a subscriber premise over a communications path that does not run through the RF signal amplifier **100** such as, for example, a separate fiber optic link, a satellite communications link or the like. For applications that, for example, have lower data rate upstream communications, these upstream communications may be provided through the RF signal amplifier **100**. In some cases, it may be important to maintain these upstream communications for these applications, even during power outages. The RF signal amplifier **100** may provide this capability as upstream communications from RF output ports **180**, **182** and/or **184** may be supported on the first communications path **112**, even during power outages.

In other cases, there may be no need to maintain upstream communications from RF output ports **180**, **182** and/or **184** during power outages. Under these circumstances, attenuators that provide a greater degree of attenuation (e.g., a 20 dB attenuator) may be used to implement the attenuator **135**. These higher value attenuators may more closely match the impedance seen at the first output **122** of the directional coupler **120** to 75 ohms during power outages.

In some embodiments, the attenuator **135** may be a “plug-in” attenuator that a technician may install in the field. Consequently, if a particular subscriber requires upstream communications from one or more of RF output ports **180**, **182**, **184** during power outages, a relatively low value attenuator (e.g., a 6 dB or 8 dB attenuator) may be inserted into an attenuator port within the RF signal amplifier **100** by the technician. If, instead, upstream communications are not required from RF output ports **180**, **182**, **184** during power outages, a higher value attenuator (e.g., a 20 dB attenuator) may be inserted into the attenuator port within the RF signal amplifier **100** by the technician.

FIG. **2** is a circuit diagram of a 20 dB attenuator **200** according to certain embodiments of the present invention that may be used to implement the attenuator **135** of the RF signal amplifier **100** of FIG. **1**. As shown in FIG. **2**, the attenuator **200** comprises a pair of 61 ohm resistors **230** that are connected in series between an input **210** and an output **220** of attenuator **200**, and a shunt 15 ohm resistor **240** that extends between a node that is between the two 61 ohm resistors **230** and a reference voltage (which in this case is a ground voltage). The attenuator **200** will attenuate RF signals in the frequency range of interest (e.g., frequencies from 5 MHz to 1 GHz) by at least 20 dB.

FIG. **3** is a circuit diagram of a 20 dB attenuator **250** according to further embodiments of the present invention

that may be used to implement the attenuator **135** of the RF signal amplifier **100** of FIG. **1**. As shown in FIG. **3**, the attenuator **250** comprises a 370 ohm resistor **280** that is connected in series between an input **260** and an output **270** of attenuator **250**, and a pair of shunt 91 ohm resistors **290** that extend between each side of the resistor **280** and a reference voltage (which in this case is a ground voltage). The attenuator **250** will likewise attenuate RF signals in the frequency range of interest (e.g., frequencies from 5 MHz to 1 GHz) by at least 20 dB. While attenuators **200** and **250** are disclosed to provide concrete examples of suitable attenuator designs, it will be appreciated that any appropriate attenuator design may be used and that the attenuator may be rated for a wide range of values.

FIG. **4** is a block diagram of a bi-directional RF signal amplifier **300** according to further embodiments of the present invention. The bi-directional RF signal amplifier **300** is identical to the RF signal amplifier **100** that is described above with respect to FIG. **1**, except that RF signal amplifier **300** includes a second power amplifier **155** that is disposed on the upstream portion of the first communications path **112** between the second diplexer **160** and the first diplexer **140**. The second power amplifier **155** may be used to amplify the upstream signals received over RF output ports **180**, **182**, **184**. It will be appreciated that the RF signal amplifier **300** will not provide an upstream communications path between the RF output ports **180**, **182**, and **184** during power outages, as the VCC power feed to power amplifier **155** will be lost during such power outages, and consequently amplifier **155** will appear as an undefined impedance circuit during power outages. However, by providing an amplified upstream on the first communications path **112** improved performance may be provided when the RF signal amplifier **300** is properly powered. As aside from the above-mentioned differences RF signal amplifier **300** includes the same components and operates in essentially the exact same manner as RF signal amplifier **100**, further discussion of RF signal amplifier **300** will be omitted.

FIG. **5** is a block diagram of a bi-directional RF signal amplifier **400** according to further embodiments of the present invention. The bi-directional RF signal amplifier **400** is identical to the RF signal amplifier **100** that is described above with respect to FIG. **1**, except that in RF signal amplifier **400** the non-latching relay **130** and the attenuator **135** are moved downstream of the first diplexer **140**. As RF signal amplifier **400** includes the same components and operates in essentially the exact same manner as RF signal amplifier **100**, further discussion of RF signal amplifier **400** will be omitted.

FIG. **6** is a block diagram of a bi-directional RF signal amplifier **500** according to still further embodiments of the present invention. The bi-directional RF signal amplifier **500** is similar to the RF signal amplifier **400** that is described above with respect to FIG. **5**. However, as shown in FIG. **6**, the RF signal amplifier **500** only includes the first communications path **112**, and hence both the directional coupler **120** and the second communications path **114** are omitted from the RF signal amplifier **500**. In order to provide for communications during power outages, the RF signal amplifier further includes a second non-latching relay **530** that has outputs **532** and **534**. The non-latching relay **530** is positioned in the first communications path **112** between the power amplifier **150** and the second diplexer **160**.

When power is supplied to RF signal amplifier **500**, each of the non-latching relays **130**, **530** will stay in a first position (referred to herein as the “ON” position) such that the input of relay **130** connects to port **132** and the input of relay **530** connects to port **532**. Consequently, downstream RF signals

11

that are received at RF input port 110 will pass through the high side of diplexer 140, through relay 130, through power amplifier 150, through relay 530, through the high side of diplexer 160 to the power divider network for distribution to RF output ports 180, 182, 184. When the power supply to RF signal amplifier 500 is interrupted, relays 130 and 530 sense this interruption (since the power supply voltage VCC is no longer received at relays 130, 530) and automatically reset from their "ON" positions to a second position which is referred to herein as the "OFF" position. When this occurs the relays 130, 530 isolate the power amplifier from the downstream portion of the first communications path 112, and switch a passive path 538 that connects output 134 of relay 130 to output 534 of relay 530. The upstream portion of the first communications path 112 is a passive path so that it is generally not impacted by the loss of power to RF signal amplifier 500.

One potential advantage of the RF signal amplifier 500 is that it can provide a bi-directional communications path to all of the RF output ports 180, 182, 184 that will remain in place even when the power supply to RF signal amplifier 500 is interrupted (although the ability to amplify the downstream signals will be lost when the power supply is lost). However, the design of RF signal amplifier 500 includes a second non-latching relay which can increase the manufacturing costs of the amplifier.

FIG. 7 is a block diagram of a bi-directional RF signal amplifier 600 according to still further embodiments of the present invention. The bi-directional RF signal amplifier 600 includes an RF input port 110, first and second non-latching relays 620, 650, first and second directional couplers 630, 640, first and second high-low diplexers 140, 160, first and second power amplifiers 150, 155, a power divider network 170, and RF output ports 180, 182, 184, 186, 188. The RF input port 110, the first and second high-low diplexers 140, 160, the first and second power amplifiers 150, 155, the power divider network 170, and RF output ports 180, 182, 184 have been described previously and hence further discussion of these components will be omitted.

As shown in FIG. 7, the input to the first relay 620 is coupled to the RF input port 110. A first output 622 of relay 620 is coupled to the input of the first directional coupler 630, and a second output 624 of relay 620 is coupled to the input of the second directional coupler 640. A first output 632 of the first directional coupler 630 is coupled to the input to the first diplexer 140, and a second output 634 of the first directional coupler 630 is coupled to a first output 652 of the second relay 650. A first output 642 of the second directional coupler 640 is coupled to the second output 654 of the second relay 650, and a second output 644 of the second directional coupler 640 is coupled to RF output port 188. Finally, the input to the second relay 650 is coupled to RF output port 186.

When power is supplied to RF signal amplifier 600, relays 620, 650 will remain in their "ON" positions, as shown by the solid line signal path within each relay 620, 650 in FIG. 7. Under these conditions, a first communications path 112 is provided between RF input port 110 and each of RF output ports 180, 182, 184, which includes amplification on both the downstream and upstream components of the communications path. Additionally, a second communications path 114 is provided between RF input port 110 and RF output port 186 via the relays 620, 650 and the first directional coupler 630. This second communications path 114 is a passive, non-amplified communications path.

When the power supply to RF signal amplifier 600 is interrupted, relays 620, 650 will reset to their "OFF" positions, as schematically shown in FIG. 7 by the dotted lines within each

12

relay 620, 650. Under these conditions, the first communications path 112 becomes inoperable, as the power amplifiers 150, 155 cease to operate and will no longer pass signals. While the second communications path 114 also is lost due to the resetting of relays 620 and 650, an auxiliary second communications path 114' is simultaneously created between RF input port 110 and RF output port 186 that passes through the first relay 620, the second directional coupler 640, and the second relay 650. Additionally, during times when the power supply is interrupted, a third communications path 116 is established between RF input port 110 and RF output port 188. This third communications path 116 passes through the first relay 620 and the second directional coupler 640. The third communications path 116 may be used, for example to provide a communications path for a second device at the subscriber premise such as, for example, a cable modem that provides Internet connectivity for a laptop computer. To operate properly during power outages, this cable modem would need a battery backup to power the cable modem during the power outage.

FIG. 8 is a block diagram of a bi-directional RF signal amplifier 700 according to still further embodiments of the present invention. The bi-directional RF signal amplifier 700 is similar to the RF signal amplifier 600 of FIG. 7, except that in the RF signal amplifier 700 of FIG. 8, the RF output port 188 is omitted and the directional coupler 640 of amplifier 600 is either omitted or replaced with a 3 dB attenuator 740.

The first communications path 112 of RF amplifier 700 will operate in the exact same manner as the first communications path 112 of RF amplifier 600, and accordingly further description of this communications path of RF amplifier 700 will be omitted. RF signal amplifier 700 further includes a second communications path 114 and an auxiliary second communications path 114' that are similar to the second communications path 114 and auxiliary second communications path 114' of RF signal amplifier 600. The second communications path 114 and auxiliary second communications path 114' of RF signal amplifier 700 operate as follows. When power is supplied to RF signal amplifier 700, relays 620, 650 will remain in their "ON" positions, thereby providing a second communications path 114 between RF input port 110 and RF output port 186 that passes through the first relay 620, the directional coupler 630 and the second relay 650. When the power supply to RF signal amplifier 700 is interrupted, relays 620, 650 will reset to their "OFF" positions, which will disable the second communications path 114. However, the resetting of relays 620 and 650 establish the auxiliary second communications path between RF input port 110 and RF output port 186 that passes through the first relay 620, the 3 dB attenuator 740 (if provided) and the second relay 650. Thus, the combination of the second communications path 114 and the auxiliary second communications path 114' together provide a non-interruptible communications path between RF input port 110 and RF output port 186. Note that the RF signal amplifier 700 does not include the third communications path 116 or the RF output port 188 that are included in the RF signal amplifier 600 of FIG. 7. The 3 dB attenuator 740, which is optional, may be provided so that the attenuation of the second communications path 114 and the auxiliary second communications path 114' may be similar.

As noted above, it may be desirable in some applications to include the 3 dB attenuator 740 so that signals traversing the second communications path 114 will experience approximately the same amount of attenuation in situations where power is supplied to the RF signal amplifier 700 and in situations in which power is not supplied to the RF signal amplifier 700. However, in other applications, it may be desirable to

13

omit the attenuator 740 as this may provide improved performance during power outages. In particular, as discussed above, when a power feed is provided to the RF signal amplifier 700, signals traverse the second communications path 114, which runs through the “ON” positions of relays 720 and 750 and through the directional coupler 730. As is known to those of skill in the art, the insertion loss of SPDT relays may be on the order of 0.5 dB, while the insertion loss of a conventional directional coupler that evenly splits a received signal is on the order of 3.5 dB to 4 dB. Thus, when power is supplied to the RF signal amplifier 700, the insertion loss on the second communications path 114 may be on the order of 4.5 dB to 5 dB.

In contrast, when the power feed to the RF signal amplifier is lost, signals instead traverse the auxiliary second communications path 114', which runs through the “OFF” positions of relays 720 and 750, and thus does not pass through the directional coupler 730. As such, the insertion loss on the auxiliary second communications path 114' may be on the order of 1 dB, and should certainly be less than 1.5 dB. During power outages, any devices in the subscriber premise that are communicating through the RF signal amplifier 700 will be doing so on battery power. These devices may automatically adjust their signal transmission levels based on the level of attenuation experienced. Thus, by omitting the attenuator 740, it may be possible to reduce the attenuation that signals traversing the auxiliary second communications path 114' will experience during power outages by 3.5 dB to 4.0 dB (i.e., by more than a factor of two). This reduction in transmit power level may reduce the power consumption of the device communicating through the RF signal amplifier 700. As the battery operated devices will only have limited charge, this reduction in power consumption may extend the battery life, thereby allowing for communications for longer periods during power interruptions. Thus, RF signal amplifiers according to some embodiments of the present invention may provide ultra low losses during power interruptions, which may extend the period of time during the power interruption during which a communications capability is provided.

The foregoing disclosure is not intended to limit the present invention to the precise forms or particular fields of use disclosed. It is contemplated that various alternate embodiments and/or modifications to the present invention, whether explicitly described or implied herein, are possible in light of the disclosure.

That which is claimed is:

1. A bi-directional RF signal amplifier, comprising
 - an RF input port;
 - a switching device having an input that is coupled to the RF input port, a first output and a second output;
 - a diplexer having a common input, a high frequency output and a low frequency output, the common input coupled to both the first output of the switching device and the second output of the switching device;
 - an RF output port that is coupled to the high frequency output of the diplexer; and
 - an attenuator that is coupled between the second output of the switching device and the common input of the diplexer.
2. The bi-directional RF signal amplifier of claim 1, further comprising:
 - a power input for receiving electrical power;
 - wherein the switching device is configured to pass signals between the input of the switching device and the first output of the switching device when electrical power is received at the power input and that is further configured to pass signals between the input of the switching device

14

and the second output of the switching device when an electrical power feed to the power input is interrupted.

3. The bi-directional RF signal amplifier of claim 2, wherein the attenuator includes an attenuator input port, an attenuator output port, at least one resistor coupled in series on a signal path extending between the attenuator input port and the attenuator output port and at least one resistor shunted between the signal path and a reference voltage.

4. The bi-directional RF signal amplifier of claim 2, wherein the RF output port comprises a RF first output port, the bi-directional RF signal amplifier further comprising:

- a second RF output port; and
- a directional coupler having an input that is coupled to the RF input port, a first output that is coupled to the input of the switching device and a second output that is coupled to the second RF output port via a non-interruptible communications path.

5. The bi-directional RF signal amplifier of claim 4, wherein the non-interruptible communications path comprises a first non-interruptible communications path, the bi-directional RF signal amplifier further comprising a second non-interruptible communications path that is configured to pass upstream signals from the first RF output port to the RF input port via the attenuator when the electrical power feed to the power input is interrupted.

6. The bi-directional RF signal amplifier of claim 4, wherein the directional coupler splits an input signal evenly between its first output and its second output.

7. The bi-directional RF signal amplifier of claim 4, wherein the diplexer comprises a first diplexer, the bi-directional RF signal amplifier further comprising:

- a power amplifier having an input that is coupled to the high frequency output of the first diplexer; and
- a second diplexer that is coupled between an output of the power amplifier and the first RF output port.

8. The bi-directional RF signal amplifier of claim 7, further comprising a power dividing circuit having an input and a plurality of outputs that is between the second diplexer and the first RF output port, wherein the first RF output port is connected to one of the plurality of outputs of the power dividing circuit.

9. The bi-directional RF signal amplifier of claim 7, further comprising a power regulation circuit that receives electrical power from the power input and that outputs a power supply voltage, wherein the power supply voltage is coupled to the power amplifier and the switching device.

10. An RF signal amplifier, comprising:

- a power regulation circuit that is configured to generate a power supply voltage in response to power received from an external source;
- an RF input port;
- a first RF output port;
- a second RF output port;

a first communications path that extends between the RF input port and the first RF output port, the first communication path including a power amplifier that is configured to amplify downstream signals passing from the RF input port to the first RF output port;

a second, non-interruptible communications path that extends between the RF input port and the second RF output port, wherein the second, non-interruptible communications path is configured to support both downstream and upstream RF communications even in the absence of power from the external source;

a switching device that is configured to selectively switch a circuit element in series onto the first communications

15

path in between the RF input port and an input to the power amplifier in response to a loss of power from the external source.

11. The RF signal amplifier of claim 10, wherein the circuit element comprises an attenuator.

5

12. The RF signal amplifier of claim 11, wherein the switching device comprises a non-latching relay.

13. The RF signal amplifier of claim 11, further comprising:

a first diplexer that is coupled between a first output of the switching device and the first RF output port; and
a second diplexer that is coupled between the first diplexer and the first RF output port,
wherein the power amplifier is coupled between the first and second diplexers.

10

15

14. The RF signal amplifier of claim 13, further comprising a directional coupler having an input that is coupled to the RF input port, a first output that is coupled to the first communications path and a second output that is coupled to the second, non-interruptible communications path.

20

15. The RF signal amplifier of claim 11, wherein the attenuator includes an attenuator input port, an attenuator output port, at least one resistor coupled in series on a signal path extending between the attenuator input port and the attenuator output port and at least one resistor shunted between the signal path and a reference voltage.

25

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16